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DE RUEHSN #0822 1202219
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6090
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000822

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DEPARTMENT FOR PM/RSAT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2017
TAGS: MARR MASS MOPS PREL PTER IZ ES
SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR TO STAY IN IRAQ

REF: A. STATE 54925

1B. 06 SAN SALVADOR 2953
1C. 06 SAN SALVADOR 2394

Classified By: Ambassador Charles L. Glazer for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) In recent months post has raised points similar to those contained in reftel A, encouraging the GOES to maintain its presence in Iraq with at least the continued deployment of the current composition of the Cuscatlan Battalion. Though the negotiations with the Legislative Assembly in late 2006 (reftel B) to extend the presence of El Salvador in Iraq through 2007 required some heavy lifting, and the deployment continues to require significant expense of political capital for the GOES, the Saca Administration at all levels has continually reassured post privately that the El Salvador intends to stay in Iraq as long as the U.S. does. Though the USG does not directly link El Salvador's deployment to Iraq to other major areas of concern in our bilateral relationship, the Salvadorans do. The GOES feels that a negative decision on an issue like TPS extension would deprive them of any remaining political capital to maintain their current level of commitment. In this context, continued high level political and military engagement may be necessary to keep this deployment in its current formation of 380 troops and in their configuration as the Cuscatlan Battalion.

12. (C) A decision to expand the size of El Salvador's deployment might be welcomed by members of the El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) as they continue to be enthusiastic about the benefits the experience provides for the professionalization of their forces. Nevertheless, it is very unlikely the political will exists for the Saca Administration to make such a decision. Head of the Armed Forces General Molina indicates that the Ninth Contingent of the Cuscatlan Battalion will be prepared to deploy in August, and discussions are already under way to start initial preparations for the Tenth Contingent. Excellent opportunities to keep up the pressure on the GOES to stay the course include the upcoming Coalition Conference in Tampa (both a civilian and military representative will attend for the GOES), General Molina's visit to Washington and call on DAS Shapiro, and DAS Coulter's visit to El Salvador.
Glazer